

# 2001-12-03: Being Oneself

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

zen, meditation, burdened, inhibition, monk, ed, sitting, brown, personality, thought, practice, enlightened, kitchen, people, flow, zen center, discovered, river, smalls, person

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I'll just talk a little bit because we'd like to also end a little bit early today because with the homeless are coming in at nine o'clock and so we'd like to kind of be out of here so that they're not kept out in the cold while we're kind of lingering too much.

So in the suttas, there's a story of a monk who was fully enlightened, he was in our heart. And this monk, one day had to cross a river. The shallow river had to cross the shallow river walk across it. And so he yanked up his robes that Buddhist monks were prance across the river kind of a little bit wildly and stashing and you know, you know, without much dignity and other monks thought, and they thought this was inappropriate behavior for a dignified monk, and how could he be enlightened, fully enlightened to be so, you know, awkward or is I'm saying something silly, he's he crossed the river or whatever. And so they went to the Buddha to complain, you know, or say something, what's going on here? And so the Buddha said, Oh, don't worry about this. He is, in fact, fully enlightened. But for a number of his former lifetimes, he was a monkey.

And it's in his nature. He's kind of this little monkey nature and there still is in there. And that's the way he behaves. You know, what do you expect, you know, And when I first came to the San Francisco Zen Center, one of the first teachers, Zen teachers that I encountered, there was Ed Brown, who's come here spoke spoken to here sometimes. And I was very impressed by him. And very inspired by him. And it was seen, you know, being very young and, and not knowing much about Zen or spirituality. I assumed that the point of Zen practice was to become just like Ed Brown. And then the problem was that I didn't left and center, you know, you visited for a couple of weeks, then I went away for a space two years. And I carried with me this idea for two years that was supposed to be like Ed Brown. You know, and this is what, you know, I didn't, I knew I wasn't, so it wasn't like I was trying to make myself like him. I thought that practice was going to lead me to become like it. So I wasn't burdened by that. idea. And then two years later, I went back to the San Francisco Zen Center. And I met some of the other senior priests there. Remember, there was one who was sitting, it's kind of a

classic story where he was having, I think, was Philip Whalen. Some of you might know the poet. And I think he was sitting having his breakfast Cheerios or something. And he was there kind of kind of leaning over the table and a little bit slow, kind of not very good Zen posture. And maybe his elbow was the table is kind of like, you know, but nobody was going like this, but he was reading the newspaper at the same time. And this is not like Ed Brown. And, and then I realized really quickly, the point of Zen practice was not to become like a brown. The point of Zen practice was to become yourself. Now and what is it to be yourself, and how are the ways in which you're not willing to be yourself? What are the ways in which you hold you inhibit yourself, hold yourself back. Jack Kornfield is of the opinion that in his having surveyed and met many people who've done a lot of spiritual practice a very, very spiritually mature and lightened in different traditions and all that. He said, he says something like the one thing that they seem to have in common is that they all seem to be a centric. Something about the process of spiritual metric maturation, that lets people be more of themselves rather than less themselves. Even though in Buddhism, we talk about becoming selfless. Sometimes having no self, meaning no self doesn't mean that your personality disappears. It means that the kind of concerned with defending itself building a self constructing itself that gets in the way of your personality is falling away. There's less inhibition to your personality. And so there's greater freedom, just thinking Be how you are less concerned about whether people think you think like a monkey or not. It's okay to be silly. It's okay to be serious. It's okay to be studious. It's okay to be. You know, there's so many different ways of being human being. And everyone is unique in their own way, and cannot uniqueness. Live in your life freely, or are the ways in which you inhibit and hold it back or don't allow it or don't give it expression. When I first started doing zen, a lot of meditation, was doing Zen meditation. I started sitting every day, twice a day for 40, 40 minutes a time. So it was a lot of sitting as a new student. I said six days a week, I figured Sunday's you took day off. And I was very happy during my practice. When I first started doing the practice. I had a lot of reasons for doing it. After some months of doing it, all the reasons fell away. But I kept doing it. And it felt very strange to me that I kept doing it. Because I was a person who had reasons for everything I did. And here I was doing something like it's something made a lot of time every day. It was a big commitment and involvement and I just kept doing it. There was no I didn't have any obvious reason for it. And so I spent a lot of time reflecting or trying to discover why was I continuing to this meditation. What I found, or the answer that came to me, the best answer I came up to me was that the miracle meditation was the cleanest or most direct way I had discovered for expressing myself. It was a form of self expression. Even though it doesn't look like that you're sitting there quietly, you know, not moving.

But the way I wasn't moving physically, it wasn't moving verbally, but was letting go of all the inhibitions, all the fears, all the desires, and all the kind of things that got in the way of some more natural flow of personality, some more inherent flow of personality, just come through me just be me just to be who I was without. And I was very lucky in a sense, even though I had this Ed brown kind of fixation. I was very lucky in my early days of Zen of Zen practice, that I had no idea what was supposed to happen in Zen practice. I mean, during during meditation, and I didn't know anything about getting concentrated, for example, I just thought you're supposed to sit there and just let things be. You know, as they were, it wasn't like, I didn't no idea that I had no idea that what was happening

and anything that was happening was not supposed to be happening. I had no idea of censoring or stopping it was just like, let me try to fully be here for what's here. And I wasn't very good at it. But I didn't know you're supposed to be good at it. So I was very lucky. And I kind of Beginner's luck. So it was so very quickly I discovered this kind of freedom of leaving myself alone meditation. And this is one of the great gifts of meditation can bring you the gift of learning how to leave yourself alone. And just let what's there, be there and flow through you let your emotions flow through you. You can have the most saintly emotions, angelic emotions and the most satanic when you sit and meditate, and it's completely okay. It's like maybe the only place in your life where you can it's okay to have these things. And then of course through you got the inhibition up you're sitting still letting news flow through you. So what is it what is it to free your free who you are to become free? What is it that you hold back from? Are you afraid of saying certain words Saying things to certain people or acting certain ways, because it doesn't put you in a good light. Because you're afraid people reject you or not like you, or you're afraid of being a certain way in life because people have rejected you in the past because of it. So what's required then is developing inner courage and inner strength to become stronger than needing to have people like you was very liberating for me when I was at his kitchen at Tassajara. I was a kitchen manager and it's one of one of the most lightning rod jobs at this monastery. Because everyone, no one in the crew likes the manager. And because it's a lot of work to be done, it's very intense like a pressure cooker kind of environment. And the managers make sure all the work gets done. I told one person to please cut the cucumbers a little bit smaller, just because had to fit into into the smalls in bowls and she burst into tears because that kind of pressure cooker place. It is And, and so I, I told her so what I realized after a while, was how burdened I was in this role of wanting everyone to like me. And I was constantly kind of contorting myself in ways and saying things certain ways or trying to be. So that makes sure everyone liked me in the kitchen. And when I finally noticed that, and how what a burden it was, and overcame the need to have everyone in the kitchen like me. Well, then people like me. But, but, but then it you know, it became much better for me, you know, because it just I just take care. I just took care of business. So sometimes becoming ourself requires a lot of courage, because sometimes we are weird and people don't like it. It isn't like being yourself means that, you know that you can become like this wonderful, perfect, you know, you know who you are as the innate, you know, perfect spiritual person. I mean, some of you guys are weird. I mean, if jack kornfield, right, all of you are. I'm weird. I'm really odd person. I mean, I'm really an odd person. I mean, I mean me, so, but you know. So for those of you who are odd, maybe not all of you are but those of you are odd. If you're gonna be happy, you have to be happy being odd. If you don't want to be you know, otherwise you're not gonna be happy.

So can you be yourself in a wise way? Can you be yourself wise way mean so you don't hurt anybody or distress anyone, but also so that you don't worry so much about you know, the kind of things that keep you from being yourself. Can you be strange can be can you be odd? Can you be a senator? Can you be unique? Can you not stand in your own way? Can you be uninhibited? My hope for all of you is that as you learn to meditate, the meditation is in part, a process of you becoming free to leave yourself alone and in learning how to do with meditation, then you can learn to begin to do with more in your daily life and then work in the life that you live.

So may you all be eccentric? Thank you